

Playing A Round

Keeping Your Business On Course

By Tom Trush



Few activities are more symbolic of corporate culture than an afternoon on the golf course. Whether you're networking, closing a contract or just spending a few hours with the boss away from the office, the fairways are a well-known hotspot for building business relationships.

According to Warren Pitman, general manager of Bougainvillea Golf Club in Laveen, business success on the golf course begins before you set foot on the first tee box.

"When you decide to take a client out to the golf course, you need to get a tee time - don't just call the morning of and think you're getting on the course," he said. "Then arrive in plenty of time because you probably don't want your client paying for the round."

Pitman suggests setting up a meeting time about 15 minutes after you get there, so you don't put your client in the awkward position of looking for you or wondering who's paying the fee. He adds you'll make a strong impression if you schedule your tee time early in the morning or around 12:15 p.m. because that leaves time to talk business over lunch or a drink after the round.

Once on the course, etiquette is essential. Don't swear, maintain an appropriate pace of play and keep the conversation light.

"Most people want to play golf, not talk business," Pitman stressed. "You might start the business conversation on (hole) 18 and then sit down and have a drink afterward."

If golfing with a group, varying skill levels are common. Instead of letting your ego convince you to play the back tees, Pitman advises selecting a set you feel comfortable with.

"Play the easiest set of tees possible because you want to enjoy yourself," he said, adding that most courses have four or five sets from which to choose. "If you have four people in your group, there's no problem with three different sets of tees being played - that's what they're there for."

Business women are also interested in building relationships on the golf course, says Edythe Higgins, a business sales officer and vice president at Wells Fargo Bank. An avid golfer who's played with potential and current clients for the last six years, Higgins suggests seeking out sponsored events or tournaments when golfing with business contacts.

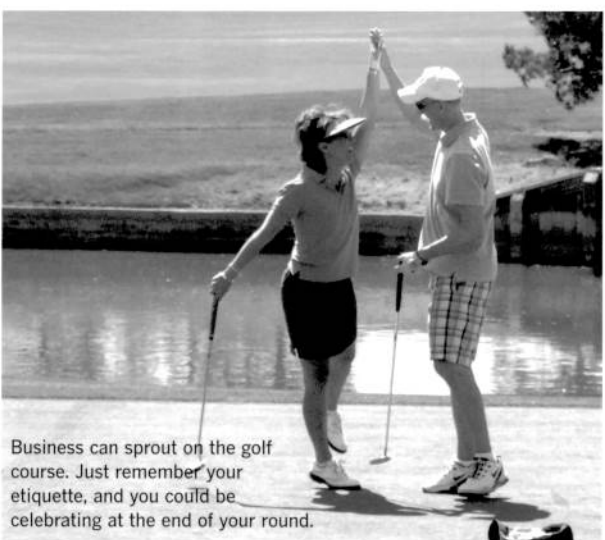
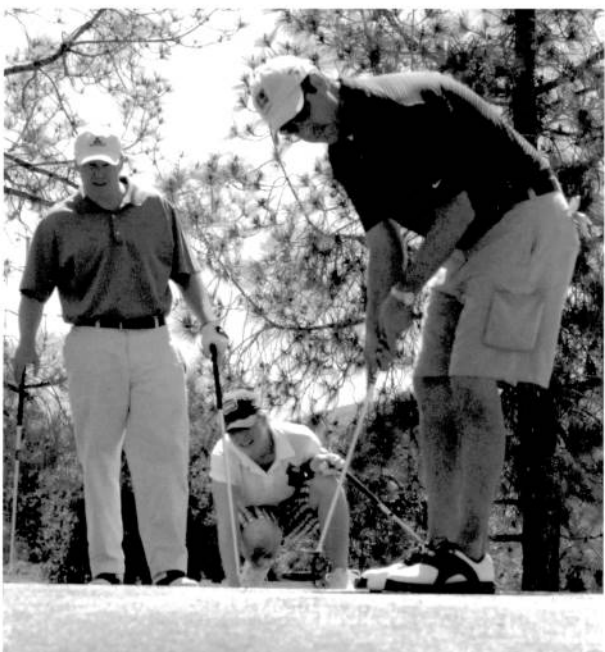
"Then food is provided, you have other people they can connect with as well, and there are prizes," she said.

Higgins, who is a member of Golf for Cause, an organization that helps business professionals use golf as a way to achieve objectives, also avoids asking for business while on the course. Instead, she prefers getting to know her playing partners and ensuring their needs are met. If business is discussed, she lets clients initiate the conversation.

"It just depends on who you're with - you have to watch your prospects and see how they act out there," said Higgins, who received a referral last year worth \$5 million as a result of a golf outing.

In addition to generating new business for herself, Higgins credits golfing for expanding her network so she can give leads to others.

"It's a tool that allows you to mingle with the right business people," she emphasized.



Business can sprout on the golf course. Just remember your etiquette, and you could be celebrating at the end of your round.

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www.bvgolf.net

Golf for Cause

www.golfforcause.com

Wells Fargo

www.wellsfargo.com